

Governance Trends in West Africa, 2006

A Synthesis Report

Adebayo Olukoshi



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Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa



Open Society Initiative for West Africa

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Preface

The West African sub-region has a distinctive history as one of the most dynamic parts of the African continent. Forged out of a long, often contradictory, always contested trajectory of state formation, dissolution, and recomposition that has been accompanied at different stages by widespread population movements, the sub-region has, inevitably, grappled with a wide range of core, enduring governance questions. These questions have contributed, to one degree or another, to the making and character of contemporary state systems, as well as the political cultures underpinning them. The questions have, among others, ranged from the basic rules for the constitution of political communities and the processes for the absorption of new populations, including the mobilisation of their consent, to the modes of administration of political territories. The questions have also extended to systems of checks – and – balances in the exercise of political power, the articulation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the definition and operationalisation of rules of political succession. In many ways, from the earliest history of West African political formations to date, these core governance issues have been recurring decimals in the sub-region, only being articulated over time in (qualitatively) different local and global contexts.

Over the years, researchers have grappled with the task of finding appropriate interpretative frames for understanding the dynamics of governance in West Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. Invariably, these efforts have been characterised more by attempts at reading West Africa from the lenses of others and less by investments in grasping the complex processes taking place in the sub-region as contradictory outcomes of context and history that deserve to be understood in their own right, on their own terms. Although the report that forms the object of this publication is not meant to serve as a critique of the dominant concepts and theories of governance, it is, nevertheless, still necessary to state upfront that it implicitly challenges the approaches that seek to understand governance in West Africa solely or primarily by drawing analogies from the historical experiences of others – especially Europe and the United States – or stylising those experiences into international standards against which attempts are then made to measure the validity of all other records of governance.

In the period since the mid-1980s, policy intellectuals have, for their part, sought consciously to articulate measures supposedly aimed at improving governance in the developing regions of the world, including West Africa, and purportedly building local capacities for good governance. But the intervention frames that they have developed have been eminently technocratic in nature, thereby emptying the concept of the politics that gives meaning to it in the first instance. Also, consciously or unconsciously, the term governance has come to be reduced to a code word for elite corruption and/or impropriety in public office. This has had the consequence of severely narrowing its remit and unwittingly reducing it to a permanent one-sided discourse about pathologies. Furthermore, the technocratic notions of governance that are prevalent have tended to treat the concept not as a dynamic domain that is full of contradictory possibilities connected to live social struggles but as a frozen set of measureable parameters which are sometimes abstractly constituted.

Going beyond dominant perspectives on governance to gather information on the trends unfolding in West Africa in 2006 required the development of a working definition of the concept. That definition was built on the premise that the challenges of governance are integral to all political systems and are, therefore, not peculiar to any one region of the world. It was also assumed, for conceptual purposes at least, that governance is a holistic concept that encompasses the entire spectrum of issues that are necessary for the achievement and reproduction of balanced state-society relations. Viewed from this perspective, it was felt that the story of governance ought to be less about the misdeeds of elites and more about struggles for the expansion of the frontiers of citizenship in a democratic developmental framework. Furthermore, the idea of the governance agenda in any given country as product of history and context was stressed, as was the position that democratic governance is an ideal with the status of permanent work in progress. In effect, this implies that specific governance episodes and phases are best understood in terms of their location in a historical flow. Finally, a dialectical understanding of the concept of governance was adopted by which governance concerns are seen as being played out not in a unilinear, unproblematic manner, but in a multidimensional way which is replete with contradictions that simultaneously embody advances and setbacks.

It is hoped that readers of this synthesis report will find it useful as a quick and easily digestible summary of some of the key developments in West Africa that had a direct bearing on governance in the sub-region during 2006. The report does not pretend to be exhaustive – it cannot possibly be. Nor is it constructed as a chronological account – that was not deemed

desirable. Rather, it seeks, in an omnibus manner, to tie together various developments in West Africa in presentational and analytic rubrics that are designed to give insights into a variety of governance issues which can each be pursued in their own right in much greater depth by readers who might have an inclination to do so.

Acknowledgements

The production of this synthesis report on governance trends in West Africa during 2006 drew on the quarterly monitoring reports that were prepared by researchers based in different countries across the sub-region. The report is a direct product of a collaborative endeavour that was launched in the last quarter of 2005 between the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). For the purposes of the monitoring exercise that was undertaken and this synthesis report, a broad definition of West Africa was adopted to include all the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plus Cameroon, Mauritania, and Chad. The notion of governance that was employed for the collection of data and the preparation of this synthesis encompasses the range of political, economic, social and cultural concerns that are germane to struggles for meaningful participation, effective representation, and significant, incremental improvements in livelihoods in West Africa. These struggles ultimately centre on issues of citizenship and the plethora of entitlements/entitlement expectations constructed around it to constitute the core of state – society relations. However, on account of the requirements of prioritisation that was set for the researchers involved in the collation of primary information on trends, it will be noticed that most of the points that are covered in this synthesis centre primarily on the dynamics of politics in the broad developmental process in West Africa.

I would like, in my capacity as overall coordinator of the monitoring exercise, to thank the researchers who participated in the collection of data for 2006 for their input and collaboration. I would also like to thank the staff of the Secretariat of CODESRIA, in particular Abdon Sofonou of the Research Programme and Jean-Pierre Diouf of the CODESRIA Documentation and Information Centre (CODICE), for the back-up support which they offered to the researchers, as well as the additional data on the 2006 governance experience in West Africa that they generated for the completion of this synthesis report. Finally, thanks are due to the Board and staff of OSIWA for the support, which they generously extended to the programme and for agreeing to launch it as a collaborative effort between them and CODESRIA. I would like especially to single out the Executive Director, Nana Tanko, and the Programme Officer responsible for Special Projects, Bose Muibi, for the encouragement, which they offered to the participants in the project at

all times. Needless to add, all errors in the report belong to me and the researchers, who undertook the monitoring exercise and cannot therefore, be attributed to either CODESRIA or OSIWA. Also, the views expressed in the synthesis report do not represent an official position by CODESRIA and/or OSIWA on any of the issues covered.

Adebayo Olukoshi

Dakar, Senegal

12 February 2007

Governance in West Africa: Historical Background, Contemporary Context

Pre-Colonial Roots

The history of the West African sub-region's engagement with issues of governance is a long one that can be traced far back in time to the earliest experiments with the constitution of political communities in the area. In the context of those experiments, which entailed nation- and state-building projects, historians have directly or indirectly pointed to the many challenges that preoccupied the political communities that were in the making in the area long before the arrival of the first European and the onset of colonial rule. The most common and frequent of the challenges that have been identified in the literature include the ways in which attempts were made to address the basic requirements for the constitution of new political communities, the processes embarked upon for securing consent and legitimacy, and the institutions-including rules-required for the administration of public affairs. Attention has also been drawn to the various experiments that were undertaken in constitution-making, the separation of powers, and the decentralisation of authority, as well as the moral codes that were drawn up to guide rulers in the exercise of their functions.

The Colonial Experience

The ways in which the early, pre-colonial challenges of governance (defined in the pre-colonial period as processes of authority management and statecraft) were tackled varied from one political formation to the other, as did the success that was registered. But whatever the process that was underway and level of progress that was registered, the colonial intervention resulted in a radical alteration of the governance agenda in the sub-region. It did so by redrawing the maps of political communities and reconstituting many of them according to the imperialist calculations of opportunity and advantage. Colonial governance was, in spite of various ideological justifications proffered for the European intervention, a project that was by definition replete with internal contradictions. In the way in which it was practised in West Africa, it entailed the denial of the basic rights of the populace and the imposition of a systematic regime of racialised exploitation and exclusion that found its ramifications in the coercive nature of the colonial state system. The contradictions built into the colonial

project were ultimately to spell its doom in West Africa as in other parts of the colonised world. Beginning with Ghana in 1957, the countries of West Africa were to be ushered into independence one after the other, most during the course of the 1960s, the last set, made up of the former Portuguese colonies of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, in 1975.

Grappling with Governance in the Post-Colonial Period: 1960–1990

In the post-independence period, the various challenges of governance which the newly independent countries of Africa were confronted with were probably brought out in their sharpest relief in West Africa both in terms of the hopes generated and the difficulties encountered. These challenges were multifaceted and they included, most importantly, the problems and prospects of constituting a coherent and viable project of nationhood out of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities indiscriminately welded together by the forces of colonialism which also introduced an ethnicised politics of divide and rule that stymied the evolution of a trans-ethnic nationalism. At one level, it involved the promotion of policy frames for the attainment of a more rapid and balanced process of economic development and social citizenship; at another level, it called for major investments in the construction of national identity and unity. With regard to the challenges of economic development and social citizenship, the record of the first decade of independence was a respectable one, with growth rates averaging seven to eight per cent and all social indicators showing an upward trend. However, the task of nation-building turned out to be much more difficult to handle and came to lie at the heart of many of the problems of governance that were to bedevil West Africa during the course of the 1960s through to the end of the 1980s.

Most of the governments of West Africa approached the project of nation-building on the assumption that it was a political project which could only be constituted by the state and which could not be successfully realised in a pluralist framework. In consequence, they took steps soon after independence to erode and dismantle electoral pluralism whilst placing independent associational life and the institutions of ethno-cultural diversity under attack. The goal of national unity – and development – was to be achieved under the banner of: One nation, one destiny, one leader, one God. It was this banner that ultimately justified the muzzling out of oppositional politics, the strident efforts at the cooptation or decimation of labour, youth, and women's movements, and the concentration and centralisation of power in the presidency. Where this approach to the project of unity and

development was most successful, it resulted in the emergence of *de jure* or *de facto* single party systems. Where it was resisted or was unable to surmount the contradictions arising, it resulted in the overthrow of civilian governments and the imposition of military rule. Whether based on single party or military rule, the countries of the sub-region witnessed a generalised militarisation of their political systems as repression and the abridgement of citizen rights became the widespread instruments of choice for regime preservation.

For much of the period from the mid-1960s onwards, West Africa became the theatre for some of the most intense cases of political violence and instability witnessed in the first two decades of African independence. Apart from the widespread use of force and the assassination of political figures, the sub-region became the *coup d'état* belt of the African continent as numerous cases of seizure of power by the military and counter-coups took place. Ethno-regional and religious conflicts of various dimensions were equally widespread, degenerating in some cases into civil wars that took a huge toll on human lives and property. Not having been fundamentally reformed after the retreat of the forces of colonialism, the state itself retained – and even reinforced – its coercive mode of relating to society. The host of governance problems that arose during this period in West Africa's history generated questions about the social bargain that underpinned the functioning of the polity and the scope which was available for the citizenship rights. These questions were to become even more strident as the economic and social conditions of the generality of the people deteriorated. With economic crises setting in from the early 1980s and the crises being compounded by the deflationary structural adjustment framework which governments were compelled to embrace by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the stage was set for new challenges to the post-independence nation-state project to emerge. These challenges, previously contained by the complex geo-politics of the Cold War environment of the 1960s and 1970s, were to be less constrained in the 1980s and 1990s following the end of the East-West ideological and military rivalries as they had come to be known. Thus it was that in the early 1990s, many regimes across West Africa, having exhausted their legitimacy, and being under strain as the discontents of economic structural adjustment accumulated, succumbed to domestic and external pressures to usher in a new era of electoral pluralism.

The Contemporary Context of Governance in West Africa

The wave of popular pressures for political reform that spread across West Africa raised hopes about the 'second liberation' of the peoples of the sub-

region. If the first liberation was designed to overcome colonialism, the second had as its thrust, the defeat of political monopoly and dictatorship. Beginning from the sovereign National Conference that was convened in Benin Republic at the beginning of the 1990s, West African governments began one after the other to succumb to pressures to reform their systems of governance by opening up the political space to all interested players, removing restrictions on the independent media and autonomous associational life, and investing in the content of citizenship in order to ensure that that members of the political community have individual and collective stakes. It was in this context that single party and military rule were ended and new constitutional frames for multiparty politics were introduced. With the exception of countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and much later, Côte d'Ivoire which descended into civil war and witnessed the collapse of central governmental authority, the political story in West Africa appeared generally to be promising, suggesting the emergence of a new, qualitatively different era in sub-regional governance: Multi-party elections were routinely organised; the independent media flourished, as did autonomous associational life; and the most unbridled abuses of rights and rules as occurred during the heyday of single party/military rule seemed to be less frequent and brazen.

However, the changes that occurred in the terrain of governance in West Africa were also uneven and, in several cases, were characterised by setbacks which added up to make the Governance Question a live one with which the peoples of the sub-region continue to grapple. Although the context of electoral pluralism within which the contemporary challenges of governance are posed may be different from the previous context of repressive and authoritarian rule, the issues arising are no less significant, touching as they do on the substance of democracy and citizenship at a time when even form and procedure continue to be problematic. Coups d'état may have become increasingly rare and popular tolerance for the unilateral confiscation of power by the military may have become low, but the robustness of the legislative system leaves much to be desired and the accountability of elected officials to the citizenry needs to substantially improved. Elections may have become routine but in the face of the danger that they may be reduced to cynical and costly pro forma rituals performed to appear to satisfy the basic requirements for international legitimacy, concerns were aired about an emerging scenario of what Claude Ake once described as voting without choosing. Social citizenship which speaks to the livelihood concerns of the ordinary West African remains elusive even as the boundaries of social inequality widen and the management of the commonwealth,

including financial and natural resources, continues to leave much to be desired.

The general issues arising from the contemporary governance situation in West Africa are clearly numerous and could be summarised as entailing the following challenges: Establishing a social contract for the functioning of the polity; institutionalising a culture of democratic accountability at all levels of government and in all aspects of public affairs; building and/or consolidating a culture of peace in the political system; promoting a greater fairness in the electoral process to achieve a better system of representativeness; broadening the participation of the citizenry in the political process; ensuring that marginalised groups – especially women and the youth – are better represented; defending the human and civic rights of the citizenry; and, importantly, registering concrete improvements in the living conditions of the populace. These governance concerns lie at the core of politics in contemporary West Africa although, as can be expected, the way they are played out in different countries varies.

Scope of the Report

This synthesis report is derived from quarterly country monitoring briefs prepared by resident researchers on governance trends in their countries as they unfolded in 2006. A broad definition of West Africa was employed for the monitoring exercise and the countries covered include: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad, The Gambia, and Togo. The synthesis report draws on the quarterly briefs produced on each of these countries during 2006 to generate an overview map of recurring governance themes that cut across national boundaries during the year. These themes are discussed briefly in terms of the different aggregate ways in which they were posed during the year, with illustrative examples cited from different specific countries as may be appropriate. The report concludes with selected issues arising from the 2006 sub-regional governance experience to pinpoint themes that merit further attention in the form of policy dialogues, doing so on the basis of a preview of trends which would require to be watched in 2007.

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Recurring Themes in West African Governance in 2006

Ruling Party Hegemony

In virtually every West African country, the question of the exercise by ruling parties of the advantages associated with their incumbency was a recurrent theme. Having control of the resources of the state in a context of widespread poverty and seeking to consolidate their hold on power, ruling parties from Burkina Faso, Ghana and Niger to Nigeria, The Gambia, and Senegal deployed their energies to erode the foundations of opposition parties which in many cases were in a very weak position either to defend their position or challenge the ruling parties in any meaningful way. The methods used by ruling parties to undermine opposition and cement their dominance varied within and across countries, often representing an admixture of methods. They include the cooptation of key opposition figures through various inducements, the deployment of violence, the use of the security agencies to harass and hound supporters and leaders of the opposition, and the shifting of the goal posts in the middle of the political game in order to wrong-foot the opposition. In several countries of the sub-region, including most notably Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Guinea, and Mali, the hegemony of the ruling party or power coalition was so strong as to amount to a de facto one party system. In other cases like Senegal where ruling party dominance was under constant contestation, it was only by resorting to the use of parliamentary majorities that government was able to force through legislation. Few were the countries (such as Cape Verde) where, on account of the balance of power between the ruling party and the opposition, the latter was able to exact accountability from the government, bolstered in this by its numeric strength, cohesiveness, and vigilance.

Opposition Disarray

The energy invested by ruling parties in the consolidation of their positions of advantage was matched across the sub-region by the state of disarray in many of the opposition political parties. In most countries, processes of fragmentation within opposition parties were commonplace – the result of various factors ranging from ruling party tactics to destabilise opposition to internal problems of governance within the parties themselves. At the root

of most of the problems faced by opposition parties is their inability in most cases to retain their support base between elections. Explanations for this state of affairs are varied: financial difficulties encountered; inability to dispense patronage; ruling party machinations; narrow/sectarian calculations of advantage; opportunistic choices made by some members of the leadership; and popular disillusionment with politicians. Some of the most spectacular cases of disarray in the ranks of the opposition occurred in Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Mali, and Guinea. The consequence of the disarray was the absence of a credible alternative to ruling parties. In the face of the weakness of the opposition, the task of effectively challenging government shifted primarily to the media and/or civil society organisations.

Executive-Legislature Relations

The principle of separation of powers that is key to the processes of democratisation underway in different countries across Africa continued to be fraught with difficulties. Two broad typologies of Executive-Legislature relations were in evidence in West Africa in 2006. The first comprised contexts where the legislature as a body was more or less entirely submissive to the Executive, taking its cue only from the latter and acting within the confines defined for it. This was the case in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. The second typology was made up of contexts where the legislature made some spirited efforts at defining its own space in a bid, successful or not, to better play its role in the political checks – and – balances equation. This seemed to be the case in countries like Benin, Ghana, and Nigeria. There was no country where the legislature as a body was successful in exercising its oversight role in full autonomy. The reasons for this were multifaceted even if occurring in differing mixes in different countries: paucity of finance; absence of control by the legislature over its own budget; a narrowly defined notion of party discipline that constrained individual parliamentarians; the widespread deployment of Executive patronage to buy parliamentary silence or acquiescence; and the ever-looming threat of the deployment of sanctions against individual legislators in a context where the coercive apparatuses of the state are controlled by the Executive.

Political Violence and Insecurity

2006 witnessed frequent incidences of political violence across West Africa. The roots of the violence that occurred were as diverse as the forms which they took. The forms included factional party conflicts and inter-party

clashes; cases of assassinations of political activists/opponents; ethno-regional clashes; violent student protests; and religious clashes. Countries where political violence featured prominently in 2006 included Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Chad, Nigeria, and Senegal. But of all the incidences of violence that emerged during the year, none was more severe than that of Chad, which, intertwined with the difficult relationship between the country and The Sudan, and locked into the dynamics of the Darfur crisis, threatened at one point to result in the overthrow of the government of Idriss Déby Itno. The continued flow of light arms into and in the sub-region also meant that insecurity and political violence went hand-in-hand in the countries concerned.

Civil-Military Relations

Relations between civilians and the military was a dominant theme in West Africa in the heyday of military rule in the sub-region when, during the 1960s up to the beginning of the 1990s, most countries fell under military rule at one point or another. Following the restoration of multi-party politics from the 1990s onwards, investments were made in promoting more stable relations between civilians and their compatriots in the armed services. However, in the countries of the sub-region where conflicts were going on or which were recovering from civil war, the abuse of the rights of the civilian population was widespread during 2006 and ranged from the use of all manner of violence to extortion. Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Chad, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Senegal were among the countries where civil-military relations constituted an important source of concern.

The Police

Policing in a context of democratisation is a very crucial component of governance. This is especially so as the quality of policing represents one of the most important yardsticks by which state-society relations can be effectively measured. The experience registered across West Africa in 2006 was not very satisfactory on this score. Reports abounded of the abridgement of citizen rights by the police and the prevalence of extortionary practices among the police forces of the sub-region. No country was exempt from this situation although, from the frequency of reports published in the media or which came into the public domain, the problem was more severe from one place to the other. The reasons proffered for the poor record of policing in the sub-region included inadequate funding of police operations; poor levels of police remuneration; deficiencies in the training of the police; a deep-seated culture of corruption within the police forces themselves; and

inadequate institutional mechanisms for the protection of the rights and interests of the general public.

Internal Governance of Political Parties

As noted earlier, the crises of party politics continued to be a prominent feature of the West African governance landscape in 2006. At the root of many of the intra-party problems that occurred in 2006 were basic questions of the internal governance of the parties concerned, whether ruling or oppositional. Decision-making did not seem to be sufficiently broad-based, internal mechanisms for the mobilisation of opinion were generally absent, and dispute management structures were underdeveloped. Some of the conflicts that occurred pitted party officials against party members holding elected offices or executive appointments, and resulted in the latter defying the party whip and the former sanctioning or seeking to sanction them. Other disputes centred around the distribution of power and competencies. Furthermore, rivalries among elected officials and differences over strategy featured as proximate causes for challenges to the administration of parties. The crises of internal party governance that manifested themselves in 2006 were at the heart of the ensuing cross-party defections, the forging of new electoral alliances, the death of some parties, and the formation of new ones.

Judicial Independence

Judicial independence was a key component of the efforts launched in the period from the early 1990s to reconstruct the foundations of governance in West Africa with a view to making it more democratic. During 2006, the judiciary in the sub-region had a mixed experience. On the positive side, there was a greater awareness of the necessity for the judiciary to be fully supported in order to play an effective role in adjudicating the political process. This recognition underpinned civil society activism in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali, Cameroon and Guinea-Bissau for the funding of the judiciary to equip it adequately for its role. Pressure was also mounted on governments by civil society organisations to respect the decisions of the courts, especially where rulings made by the judges went against state officials or agencies. Nigeria, The Gambia, Guinea, and Burkina Faso were countries where this question was raised frequently in 2006. It was also evident in 2006 that the job of being a judge remains a hazardous one; in Benin, a member of the bench was assassinated and the investigation of the circumstances of his death was one of the highlights of the political terrain during the year.

The Media

The role of the media in West African governance was a generally positive one in 2006. Media pluralism was sustained in most countries, especially with regard to daily newspapers, weekly/monthly news magazines, and radio stations. There was also pluralism with regard to television stations, although progress in this domain was still uneven as the state maintained a monopoly or highly skewed dominance, most notably – and perhaps surprisingly – in Senegal. Access to new information and communications technologies also continued to improve apace across the sub-region as did the deployment of the ICTs for the delivery of news and information to the public. Arrests of journalists were not as widespread as once was the case in the sub-region although it is noteworthy that in The Gambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Guinea, and Chad, governments still resorted to the use of security agents to intimidate and, in some cases, persecute the independent media. Mysterious fire outbreaks engulfing the premises of opposition or independent media houses occurred in a number of countries. After many years of struggling, the Nigerian media and civil society groups had cause to celebrate when the Senate passed the Freedom of Information Bill into law; the Bill will offer citizens the right of access to information on governmental activities which were previously classified. The West Africa Democracy Radio based in Senegal also strengthened its presence after it was inaugurated and became an important source of information and debate that was beyond the reach of some of the most repressive regimes that succeeded in narrowing the scope for public scrutiny of governmental policy through the media. But perhaps the greatest contribution which the media made to governance in West Africa in 2006 lay in the concerted way in which they deployed their influence and presence to keep regimes on their toes in most countries. In Nigeria, the defeat of the agenda of the Obasanjo government to amend the constitution to allow for a third term for the president and the governors owed in great measure to the vigilance and campaigning spirit of the media which lost no opportunity to discredit the project. In Senegal, the media has also played a similarly robust watchdog role in checking some of the excesses of the government. In Ghana, cases of corruption and indiscretion in the conduct of public officials were brought into the public agenda by the media. The role of the media in exposing contradictions in the anti-corruption campaigns of the government was also critical. Clearly, it would seem from the boldness with which the media, in its pluralism, went about its watchdog mission opens a new phase in West African governance.

The Politics of Decentralisation

Decentralisation was a central element of the governance reform exercises carried out across West Africa during the period from the 1990s onwards. Several countries in the sub-region, most notably Mali and Ghana, were particularly celebrated as examples of the successful decentralisation of administrative powers. But a lingering question about the decentralisation exercises that occurred had to do with the viability of the local units of administration in terms of the resources needed to enable them to function in a meaningful and sustained manner. In all the countries of the sub-region, this question was posed during 2006 as most cash-strapped decentralised units of administration grappled with the challenges of providing basic services and meeting the expectations of the citizenry. The difficulties encountered underscore the limits of many of the decentralisation exercises carried out and the need for a re-thinking along lines that could back their functions both with the necessary powers and resources or resource-mobilisation capacities.

The Politics of Succession

All across West Africa in 2006, preparations for looming or future elections produced an interesting array of calculations around the succession of incumbents that constituted a core part of politics during the year. The calculations were manifested as much in intra- as in inter-party relations and they played out in different ways. In Benin, as in Senegal, attempts were made by ruling parties to postpone elections. The manoeuvre undertaken by the ruling party in Senegal was successful in spite of vociferous opposition and civil society protests; in Benin, it failed and Mathieu Kérékou was obliged to hand over power to Yayi Boni, the victorious candidate in the presidential elections. In several countries, most prominently Burkina Faso, Chad, and The Gambia, constitutional amendments were pushed through to remove all term limitation clauses; a similar attempt in Nigeria was defeated. In those countries where elections were neither postponed nor constitutional term limits jettisoned, energies were concentrated on getting eligible incumbents re-elected or building positions to succeed ineligible incumbents. In the latter case, intra-ruling party jostling resulted in intensive factional politics that saw some prominent figures who lost out or felt themselves losing out opting to create their own independent platforms for contesting for power. This was the case with the ruling SLPP in Sierra Leone where the apparent preference of outgoing President Tejan Kabah for his Vice-President, Solomon Berewa, to succeed him resulted in

the decision by a scion of the Margai political dynasty, Charles Margai, to leave and establish his own party.

Within opposition parties, the politics of succession also reverberated as candidates jostled among themselves to fly their party flag. In Ghana, the former ruling party, the NDC, was the site for some of the most intense internal jostling that occurred, but the NDC was not alone. Succession politics also played itself out with regard to struggles over the rules of the political game. In Côte d'Ivoire, these struggles produced a stalemate which meant elections could not, once again, be held as scheduled while in Mauritania which had experienced a coup d'état and had been brought back under military rule, it involved debates over the constitutional provisions that would guide the electoral process. In Togo, the crises which followed the death of Gnassingbe Eyadema posed a different kind of succession problem following the brazen attempt by the military to circumvent the constitution, subvert the legislative hierarchy, and impose his son on the country. Local and international opposition forced the military to retreat, although Faure Gnassingbe was still to emerge the successor to his father in the elections that were subsequently organised during 2005. The fall out of that exercise continued to be a major point for political organisation in Togo in 2006.

The Electoral System

Contestations over the electoral process were also a key feature of debates on governance in 2006. In countries ranging from Benin, The Gambia, Nigeria and Senegal to Chad, Cape Verde and Côte d'Ivoire, widespread complaints over the process of the registration of voters were voiced. Questions were also routinely raised about the independence of the authorities vested with the power to supervise the elections. The Mauritanian effort to prepare a credible transition from military to elected civilian government included public discussions on the ways of imbuing the institutional framework for electoral governance with the credibility that would win the confidence of the populace. Furthermore, issues arose over the financing of elections, with the incumbent President of Benin, for example, attempting but failing to postpone the vote on account of the unaffordability of the cost; his Senegalese counterpart was more successful in this regard in spite of the vociferous protests of the opposition.

On another note, media and civil society organisations drew attention to the huge and growing costs of elections in West Africa which effectively meant that a majority of the people with a potential interest in participating in the political process were simply shut out since they could not afford the costs. A significant number of those who entered into the fray did so either through the use of privileged access to public resources, or had been the

beneficiaries of corrupt enrichment, or depended on sponsorship by wealthy 'Godfathers' who invested in their candidature for anticipated returns should their candidates be victorious. 'Godfatherism' was a dominant theme in 2006 in Nigeria where the matter was brought to the fore of politics by crises of confidence between some 'Godfathers' and their 'Godsons' occupying elected office resulting in several of the former organising to have the latter removed from office. 'Godfather' politics was also openly at play in Guinea and Senegal where the power alliances which they produced or on which they rested became chronically unstable.

Debates also took place about the voting method to be employed and the ways in which voters would be identified at the polling booth. In Nigeria where elections are due in 2007, these debates centred on how to ensure the freeness and fairness of the anticipated elections but even in countries where the fear of rigging was not expressed as openly as in Nigeria, that concern loomed in the background. In Senegal, there was an amendment of the electoral rules to permit the members of the country's armed forces to have the right to vote for the first time in its post-independence history. The anxiety generated by the decision was matched by the tension that accompanied the introduction of new voter identity cards and the redrawing of constituency boundaries. Voter identification was an issue for debate in virtually all the countries where elections took place. In Nigeria, it was proposed to tackle the voter identification challenge by introducing an electronic voter recognition mechanism that immediately became the subject of intense controversy across the political system until it was abandoned.

The outcomes of the elections that took place during 2006 were, however, not as seriously contested as could have been imagined simply on the basis of the amount of sabre-rattling that preceded the vote: No country experienced violence on a significant scale and in Benin and Cape Verde, opposition parties accepted the verdict of the electorate in spite of whatever misgivings they may have had about one aspect or the other of the electoral process. It is also interesting to note that in a number of cases, parties forged alliances and coalitions which meant that the winning party had smaller partners with which it shared power.

Table 1: Elections in West African Countries in 2006

Country	Date	Type of Elections
Cape Verde	January 2006	Legislature
Benin	February 2006	Presidential
	March 2006	Presidential
Chad	May 2006	Presidential

Corruption

The issue of abuse of office and misappropriation of public funds was a major concern in West Africa during 2006. All the governments of the sub-region officially declared themselves committed to the fight against corruption or reiterated their commitment to that effect at local and international fora. The reasons for such public commitments were multifaceted: external donor pressures, domestic civil society pressures, internal elite wrangling, and the adverse effects of frequent cases of scandals on governmental authority. Much of the attention, which was focused on corruption, was concentrated on the public sector and public office holders. In most countries, the commitment to fight corruption was made at the very highest level of the state but the subject, as well as the efficacy or lack thereof of governmental action, also attracted the attention of civil society groups, the media and even artists such as musicians. From Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, and Benin through to Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, and The Gambia, officials alleged to have perpetrated acts of corruption were dismissed from their posts and in some cases placed under arrest for prosecution.

While in the public discourse that took place very few disagreed that corruption was a serious problem that needed seriously to be combated, the way the 'anti-corruption' war was prosecuted by governments was mired in controversies of various kinds. At one level, there was concern in many countries that the war was being prosecuted in a highly selective and partisan manner, often targeting the opponents of the regime or those who were out of favour with the head of state/government. At another level, there was a considerable amount of disquiet with the inadequate attention paid by governments to due process and the rule of law in the anti-corruption struggle. The accused were generally presumed guilty even before conviction and sometimes even without an opportunity to prove their innocence. Furthermore, even as governments purported to be fighting corruption, brazen and usually well-publicised acts of abuse of office, and theft of public funds were being perpetrated by various layers of public office holders as to make nonsense of the anti-corruption crusade. West Africa, therefore, ended 2006 with corruption still remaining a major problem and the government-led struggle to contain it remaining as ineffective as it was contentious.

Deficits in Social Citizenship

For the peoples of West Africa, 2006 continued to be a year in which their quest for enriching the socio-economic content of their citizenship remained a central challenge of the democratic project in the sub-region. The depth of

the problems of inequality and poverty in West Africa manifested itself in different ways during the year. West African countries occupied the lowest rungs of the UNDP Human Development Index, which in 2006 covered 177 states and territories, and average life expectancy still ranked among the lowest in the world. Indeed, one of the countries of the sub-region, Sierra Leone, was named the country with the lowest life expectancies in Africa; Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad were not far behind. And yet, the sub-region was also home to some of the richest individual Africans who sat at the top of a pyramid of incomes that was getting ever broader at the base and thinner at the top. Inequality and poverty were opposite sides of the same coin; together, they were the harbingers of the crises of criminality and insecurity that continued to wrack West Africa in 2006. As is already well-known, women, the youth, and children constituted a very high proportion of the people living under conditions of extreme poverty.

Table 2: West Africa in the 2006 Human Development Index

Country	Rank	HDI Category	HDI Score
Cape Verde	106	Medium	0.722
Cameroon	144	Medium	0.506
Togo	147	Low	0.495
Mauritania	153	Low	0.486
The Gambia	155	Low	0.479
Senegal	156	Low	0.460
Nigeria	159	Low	0.448
Guinea	160	Low	0.445
Benin	163	Low	0.428
Côte d'Ivoire	164	Low	0.421
Chad	171	Low	0.368
Guinea-Bissau	173	Low	0.349
Burkina Faso	174	Low	0.342
Mali	175	Low	0.338
Sierra Leone	176	Low	0.335
Niger	177	Low	0.311

Source: UNDP, 2006 Human Development Report.

Human Trafficking

The problem of human trafficking came to the fore of policy-making and political discourse several years ago and various sensitisation measures were introduced over that period to build greater awareness about it. Steps were also taken to promote coordinated responses among the governments of West Africa in order to stem the problem. Without doubt, progress was registered in reducing the traffic during the last few years and in 2006, efforts continued in this direction. But the problem has also persisted, affecting children and women in particular, involving organised syndicates which, in some cases, maintain trans-national links, and are facilitated by collaborators within the security agencies. There was anecdotal evidence published in the media during 2006, including the testimonies of some of the victims, suggesting that organised syndicates were not only involved in the attempts by young people in West Africa to migrate by boat to Europe, but also that elements of human trafficking were involved. The persistence of the problem and its acquisition of possible new dimensions, raised questions about the seriousness with which its structural roots in household poverty have been tackled to date.

West Africa's 'Boat People'

2006 was marked by an escalation in the number of young West Africans seeking to migrate to Europe through southern Spain and Italy. They mostly came from Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau and used Senegal and Mauritania as their staging post for the hazardous boat journey on the Atlantic Ocean to the Canary Islands and beyond. The numbers of young people involved, the frequency of the boat trips, and the tragedies that attended their attempts focused attention on the governance issues at the root of the migratory pressures that had built up and the toll which the pressures were taking in human life. Within the 'supplying' countries, the resort by the migrants to very desperate strategies that cost many of them their lives was a reminder, if any were needed, that the Youth Question in West Africa was still a live one begging for attention. It also was a pointer to the situation of desperate poverty and hopelessness with which many households were contending on a daily basis. This situation of desperation was taken full advantage of by syndicates which collected hefty, non-refundable fees in order to 'facilitate' the passage of young people intent on seeking their luck elsewhere through the boat ride to Europe; for many, it was a facilitation that led either no where or to an early death.

The responses of governments in the sub-region and in Europe to the migratory pressures also broached upon a host of governance concerns. In Europe, coordinated steps were taken to fortify border posts and to repatriate all those whose boats were arrested either at sea or shortly before they came ashore. Pressure was mounted on West African governments to undertake similar fortification measures. Within West Africa itself, there was recrimination as to who had responsibility for receiving the would-be migrants who were repatriated from Southern Europe. Mauritania and Senegal were to refuse to be the 'dumping' ground for the migrants, insisting that Europe respect existing international rules and conventions in the handling of similar cases. Their argument was bolstered with references to the fact that not all the persons repatriated were necessary nationals of their countries. In the end, agreements were signed with Mauritania and Senegal under which, with European Union support for the cost of the resettlement and/or onward repatriation of the migrants returned to their shores, and with the earmarking of resources to assist with the alleviation of the socio-economic difficulties encountered by the poor, they would be prepared to cooperate in a comprehensive resolution of the problem.

Managing West Africa's Natural Resource Wealth

Most West African countries are resource-rich territories and the management of that wealth has been an issue of long-standing concern internally and externally. In particular, the multi-faceted conflicts that have been associated over the years with the mining of the natural resources, the nature of the concessions granted by governments to mining companies, and the disputes over the distribution of the returns from the tapping of the natural resources are issues which were very much present in the sub-region in 2006. In Senegal, the government pointedly refused to grant prospecting concessions to multinational oil companies if the country was not guaranteed a higher share of the returns. Mauritania, for its part, joined Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Mali as the countries of West Africa that have committed to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Liberia under the leadership of Africa's first female President, Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson, was also to announce its discomfort with the terms of various concessions connected to minerals and rubber plantations concluded by the government of Charles Taylor. The renegotiation of the terms of the various concessions was opened during the course of 2006.

Disputes over the sharing of the fruits of the mining activities taking place in West Africa flared to new levels in Nigeria where the country's oil

delta was rendered increasingly ungovernable by militant armed youths calling for complete control of the oil resources of the area by its indigenes. The activities of the youths disrupted oil production at different points during the year and their campaign was also extended to the kidnapping of expatriate workers affiliated to the international oil majors and multinational service companies active in the oil sector. Bombs were also planted in the cities of Port Harcourt and Yenagoa in what was a clear strategy to undermine confidence and win attention to the seriousness of the claims of the youth. Disputes of another type occurred in 2006 when the Chadian government, under severe pressure from internal rebel groups and contending with the fall out from the Darfur crisis, announced its decision to break out of the arrangement whereby part of its oil revenue would be disbursed under the aegis of the World Bank for the development of its social sector. The government accused the World Bank of lack of respect for its sovereign rights and also threatened to expel some of the oil majors working its oil fields.

Table 3: West African Countries in the Extractive Industries
Transparency Initiative as of December, 2006

Country	Main Resource (s)
Cameroon	Crude Oil & Timber
Ghana	Gold & Timber
Guinea	Bauxite
Mali	Gold
Mauritania	Crude Oil
Niger	Uranium
Nigeria	Crude Oil & Other Precious Minerals
Sierra Leone	Diamonds & Other Precious Minerals
Chad	Crude Oil

All the oil-producing countries of West Africa benefited from the spectacular price increases that occurred through most of 2006 even if the depreciation of the United States dollar also meant that the real gains registered were limited. Managing the resulting revenue boom was, therefore, an issue of central concern during the year. In Nigeria, the government took a decision to wipe out the country's Paris and London Club debts under a complex discounting arrangement that saw it paying out over \$12 billion to its creditors. At the same time, the government took a conscious decision to build up the country's external reserves, which at the end of 2006 stood at

over \$40 billion. And yet, in Nigeria, as elsewhere in West Africa where governments enjoyed an oil revenue boom, the challenge which was posed was how to get them to take advantage of their enhanced financial position to address a range of pressing social issues in their countries. The governments were criticised by civil society groups and the media for not doing enough in this regard and for pursuing expenditure priorities, which did not seem to prioritise the fight against poverty, social exclusion, and the renewal of dilapidated physical infrastructure.

Governing the Urban Process

West African cities continued to experience a very rapid but uncontrolled process of urbanisation. This process occurred mainly in terms of the construction boom that continued during the year. Dakar in Senegal, Banjul in The Gambia, Abuja in Nigeria, and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso witnessed some of the most significant investments undertaken by governments in the sub-region in urban renewal and infrastructure upgrade. The framework for the investment made in Banjul was the hosting of the summit of the African Union during the year; for Senegal, it was in preparation for the hosting of the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. The Burkinabe effort involved the construction of a new seat of government around which major new residential and commercial developments were structured. The development of Abuja as the new capital city of Nigeria continued to absorb a considerable amount of public investments.

In spite of the investments made in Abuja, Banjul, Dakar and Ouagadougou, the urban expansion taking place in West Africa remained mostly informal and occurred in the context of limited infrastructural capacity that posed serious governance challenges. The first of these was how to deal with overcrowding and congestion that cost as much in productivity as in the health and well being of the urban population. The second centred on issues of security as the burgeoning urban context became the primary theatre for a spectrum of criminality that ranged from daring armed robberies and pick pocketing to trafficking in drugs and the abuse of drugs. Thus, cities such as Abidjan, Dakar, Accra, Freetown, and Ouagadougou, once known as relatively 'safe' places suffered a degeneration in their security status that threatened to get even worse. Other difficulties encountered included worsening problems of potable water supply, severe shortages of electricity supply, and difficulties with the distribution of gas and petrol.

The question of the mobilisation of resources for the purpose of effectively governing the expanding cities of West Africa, and the challenges of evolving

an appropriate administrative system for managing the urban experience were brought out in sharp relief by the welter of problems that emerged in 2006. Additional to these problems, concern was generated across the sub-region that unscrupulous international companies, working with local collaborators, were once again taking advantage of the weaknesses in national-territorial governance in the sub-region to dump industrial wastes, toxic and non-toxic, in the area. This concern was brought to the fore by the incident of the dumping of toxic wastes in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, by a Dutch company, which cost human lives and serious respiratory and other health problems for thousands of people resident in the city. Reactions among governments across West Africa to the Ivorian dumping incident ranged from condemnation of such practices and a call for vigilance, to assurances that adequate control mechanisms were already in place to ensure that such experiences would not occur in their own countries.

Building Peace and National Reconciliation

During 2006, several countries in the sub-region that had been affected by wars and violent conflicts in previous years continued with their efforts at peace-building and national reconciliation. In Sierra Leone, the accent of the governments' efforts has been placed on re-building the institutions of state to assume their full roles in the wake of the winding down of the United Nations operation, UNAMSIL. In Liberia, President Johnson-Sirleaf took steps to launch a truth and reconciliation process in the country as a key step in post-conflict peace building. In Guinea-Bissau, the government of President Nino Viera invested efforts in the consolidation of alliances in the political system that could assist it to maintain the relative peace in the country. Mali experienced a flare in the conflict involving Touareg militants but steps were taken to contain the situation and prevent the threat of a return to full-scale conflict. Negotiations continued throughout the year between the Senegalese government and separatist Casamance militants. Nigeria and Cameroon took steps at further consolidating the peaceful resolution of their dispute over the ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula; they did so within the framework of the ruling delivered by the International Court of Justice at The Hague ceding the Peninsula to Cameroon.

Sub-Regional Coordination

The question of the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in sub-regional governance and the structural framework for the exercise of its functions commanded attention among the political leaders and civil society organisations during 2006. The increased role of

ECOWAS in harmonising policies and strategies, mediating difficult domestic situations, providing advisory support, and serving as a catalyst for change in the sub-region was widely exercised and recognised during the year. ECOWAS undertook various missions to Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Togo, to cite the most prominent examples, in order to address problems in the realm of governance that had arisen or which were in danger of escalating, or simply to contribute to the peace consolidation process.

The summit of ECOWAS leaders, known as the Authority of Heads of States and Governments, also decided in Niamey, Niger, during the year to transform the organisation into a Commission headed by a President. The change in structure and stature was to come into effect from January 2007. Debates also took place on how the capacity, remit and effectiveness of the ECOWAS Parliament might be strengthened in tandem with the overall goal of sub-regional integration coordinated by the Secretariat. This discussion was necessitated by the tensions that emerged between the office of the Speaker of the Parliament and the Executive Secretary of the Community over the order of precedence and the implications of the coordinating role of the Secretariat in all community affairs. Attention was similarly paid to the challenges of advancing the process of monetary and financial integration, with an agenda for future action being agreed upon.

Looking Ahead to 2007

Overall, 2006 was a mixed year for the West African sub-region from the governance point of view. Progress was made in some domains and difficulties encountered in others. The experiences registered suggest that in the sub-region, as elsewhere, governance is a permanent work-in-progress. While some of the governance issues that arose in West Africa may have been tackled, others remain outstanding while even new challenges emerge. Among the concerns that were prominent in 2006, it is clear that several of them will occupy a prominent place in sub-regional politics and governance in 2007. These include elections and the electoral system; the politics of succession; corruption and the management of public resources; youth restiveness, identity, citizenship, and rights; the migratory pressures among young people; the expanding boundaries of urbanisation; conflict resolution, peace-building and security; and the politics of natural resource management. The seriousness with which these issues are tackled will be directly

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connected to the ability of governmental and non-governmental actors to draw lessons from previous experiences and design adapted frames for further action that go beyond the symptoms of difficulties that have persisted to address their structural sources. For this purpose, OSIWA might give consideration, in defining its overall strategy for the enhancement of the prospects for a well-rounded system of democratic governance in West Africa, to convening policy dialogues on a number of issues.

Proposed Policy Dialogue Themes

Obviously, there is no shortage of topics on which, potentially, policy dialogues for the enhancement of governance in contemporary West Africa could be organised. However, from the point of view of pertinence, and in the light of the broad calendar of political events taking place in 2007, it would seem that three concerns are especially central to the contemporary challenges of governance in the sub-region to merit the focused attention of OSIWA. They include:

- The Politics of Succession in West Africa;
- Corruption and Social Citizenship;
- Youth Identity and Participation.

Using its convening power, OSIWA is encouraged to invite key policy players within and outside government (civil society, the private sector, and the research community) to engage in a problem-solving focused discussion around a carefully defined set of questions on any – or, if resources permit, all – of the suggested priority issues.

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